[Information on the regional divisions of the Indian sub-continent will be found in Chapter XIII, 6: Spate AW1 India.]

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CHAPTER ONE

The Setting

I. THE SETTING

105 131 SHAMIRPET is a village situated at a distance of about twenty-five miles from the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secundrabad in the Deccan plateau of India. Culturally it lies in the region known as Telangana, which is itself a part of the wider culture-area of Andhra-desa. Telangana is a country of fertile fields and barren rocks; a land of temples, tanks and lakes. It is estimated that there are over twenty thousand lakes and tanks in this region, which covers an area of more than 42,000 square miles. Shamirpet is located by the side of one of these tanks and lies on the road that links the capital city of Hyderabad with Karimnagar, the headquarters of the northern district of that name.

133 134 137 132 The picturesque landscape of the village is truly characteristic of the Deccan plateau. The soil is in part black and in part red, and is suitable for the cultivation of rice, millet, castor and other oil-seeds, pulses and tobacco. An endless series of barren rocks formed of gneisses and granites dominates the land. Tall palmyra trees stand magnificently and imperiously against the often-clear sky, evergreen shrubs circle the rock formations and tamarind trees grow here and there near human habitation. In the countryside surrounding Shamirpet the average annual rainfall is about twenty-five inches. From Indian standards, the climate is moderate and knows no extremes either in winter or in summer. The days during the summer season are rather hot, the temperature often touching 112° F., but the evenings and nights are always cool and pleasant. In some winter nights the temperature drops to 137 45° F. There is little forest in the country immediately surrounding

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137 Shamirpet and the neighbouring cluster of villages. However, villagers are able to collect some fuel as well as small quantities of edible and marketable minor forest produce from the local
136 scrub jungle. In this type of landscape little game is to be expected. Tigers from the forests fifteen or twenty miles away are occasionally seen, but panthers, in search of stray goats, calves and dogs, are more frequent visitors to the village. Wild pigs are plentiful and always do very considerable damage to the crops. Spotted deer make an occasional appearance in the surrounding areas, while hares which abound in the shrubs are very often shot or hunted with dogs trained for this purpose. Wild ducks come seasonally to the large tank near the village, and green pigeons and partridges are among the other feathered game found in the vicinity of Shamirpet.

131 It has been pointed out that Shamirpet is only some twenty-five miles from Hyderabad and Secundrabad, which rank fourth among the cities of India in respect of population and size. It is only fifteen miles from the Bolarum cantonment and twelve miles
[494] from the military aerodrome of Hakimpet. A regular bus service plying between Hyderabad and Karimnagar touches Shamirpet, and there are about twelve buses running in both directions on this road every day. From this it should not be assumed, however, that Shamirpet is just a suburban extension of Hyderabad. Although it is in regular and constant touch with the capital, it is an independent village with an organization of its own.

621 No village in India can be singled out as being typical of the
631 country as a whole, but Shamirpet possesses most of the characteristics which are common to the rural communities in middle and peninsular India. As an independent socio-economic and ritual unit it enjoys partial self-sufficiency in several aspects of community life. In the wider organization of the rural community it possesses partial autonomy. Its component units are mostly the occupational castes which are integrated into the structure of the village. Finally, it has a semi-judicial village council composed of caste elders and other influential persons. This council administers justice in socio-religious cases involving breaches of the traditional norms of society. The village as a unit of social organization performs several significant functions which form an important agency of social control.